

**Amendments to the Specifications**

Please replace the last paragraph of page 6, which starts with "Preferably, the lytic agent..." with the following amended paragraph:

Preferably, the lytic agent is a material that preferentially lyses platelets or red blood cells without destroying a substantial portion of the bacteria present in the sample or interfering with the membrane-permeable nucleic acid staining. More preferably, the lytic agent is a detergent. Most preferably, the lytic agent is Triton X-100 (trademark of Rohm and Haas Co. for octyl phenoxy polyethoxyethanol).

Please replace the second full paragraph on page 9, which begins with "The preferred membrane-permeable stain should provide..." with the following amended paragraph:

The preferred membrane-permeable stain should provide good differentiation between fluorescence from the stained nucleic acids in the bacteria and fluorescence from stain which may be bound to other elements of the sample, such as platelets, red blood cells or serum proteins so that the method of the present invention can achieve a good sensitivity. More preferably, the membrane-permeable stain used in the present invention is a SYTO dye (SYTO is a trademark of Molecular Probes, Inc. for cell-permeant nucleic acid stains that show a large fluorescence enhancement upon binding nucleic acids) such as SYTO 40 blue, SYTO 41 blue, SYTO 42 blue, SYTO 43 blue, SYTO 44 blue, SYTO 45 blue, SYTO 13 green, SYTO 16 green, SYTO 24 green, SYTO 21 green, SYTO 23 green, SYTO 12 green, SYTO 11 green, SYTO 20 green, SYTO 22 green, SYTO 15 green, SYTO 14 green, SYTO 25 green, SYTO 81 orange, SYTO 80 orange, SYTO 82 orange, SYTO 83 orange, SYTO 84 orange, SYTO 85 orange, SYTO Orange, SYTO 64 red, SYTO 17 red, SYTO 59 red, SYTO 61 red, SYTO 62 red, SYTO 60 red, or SYTO 63 red. Most preferably, the membrane permeable stain used in the present invention is SYTO 13.

Please delete the two paragraphs of the Abstract of the Disclosure beginning on page 18, the first of which starts, "A method for determining..." and the second ends, "...relatively short period of time."

Please add the following new paragraph for the Abstract section beginning on page 18:

A method for determining the presence of bacteria in a platelet or red blood cell sample is disclosed. The method includes the steps of: lysing a substantial portion of the platelets or red blood cells; staining the bacteria using a membrane permeable nucleic acid stain; filtering the sample using a membrane filter with a suitable pore size so that a material containing the stained bacteria is retained on the membrane filter; and analyzing the material retained on the membrane filter using epifluorescence microscopy and/or digital image acquisition and analysis to determine the presence of bacteria in the sample. The method allows the detection of bacterial contamination in platelets or red blood cells at clinically significant levels in a relatively short period of time.